

# **Sidney Hipple**

## **“How I Got To Lowell”**

1

Sidney Hipple worked at a chemical factory called Step Out Chemicals, where he processed industrial chemicals. He made good money, and did it until he was twenty and got laid off. During this layoff he utilized his free time and started to compose poems and imaginative short stories.

2

His life always seemed to be excitement-oriented, looking for that next buzz -- be it Crossroads (a type of speed during the early seventies), Thai stick, a little acid, THC, a little angel dust diet, mescaline, and maybe a beer once in a while, just to be sociable. The bands he was most attracted to were King Crimson, Yes, The Who, Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention – and he had started to discover jazz: Chick Corea – Return to Forever and George Duke and Jean-Luc Ponty.

3

Everything was going fine. Everything seemed to be

under control, until he bought a thousand hits of Crossroads. He planned on selling them and making money, only most of his friends only smoked weed. He was eating so much speed he was gaining weight. He was smoking it in joints with pot. He sold some of it.

4

This would become a time of transformation in his life. He had always been withdrawn and insulated from life and its experiences. Now he was bold, now he had the courage to speak his mind. He had stuttered since he was six years old. He was now almost twenty. It gave him a confidence, a stability, a grounding. Someone else might have walked around wired, but speed seemed to have a calming effect on him.

5

Maybe because speed makes you babble on, he now had the ability to speak without stuttering. He hadn't developed a conventional, recognizable personality yet, but now he could communicate. And man, did he have a lot of thoughts to tell people. He had been quiet and limited his whole life. Now he could express the joy he had always felt. But nobody seemed to want to listen for long. That's what happens when you take speed: you

become a rambling warrior, struggling to hold people's attention. Now he had a voice that needed to be heard

6

He had always been impulsive by nature. He had developed the deep impulse to go to California and meet Frank Zappa. Now he had a purpose in life, an objective, a reason to live. He had listened to all of Frank Zappa's albums, knew the words to all of his songs, his background, his history. He was creative, and felt he could be of service to Frank Zappa. He stopped taking speed. He rarely smoked pot. He was high on life. This purpose would bring him to places he would not expect to go.

7

When he told his friends of his plans, they had behaved as though they were in agreement. Sidney had entered a state of invincibility. When he talked to people, his conviction and positive outlook sometimes overwhelmed them. He would soon find out that they assumed he was having a nervous breakdown, and were secretly making plans for him to see a psychiatrist—for his own good. After all, he had this invincible attitude. This wasn't normal. Normal

only seems to be what everybody is doing at the time.  
It's average. Sidney was never average in the first place.

8

He had sold the van he owned and was planning on having his old boss Jerry – who ran a service station – drive him to the airport to go to California. His fellow employees had gathered at the service station, and his boss announced that they would drive him to the airport if he went and saw a psychiatrist first. They believed that he was having a nervous breakdown. His behavior seemed irrational. Nobody packs up and goes to California on a whim without knowing anyone there. But Sidney's motivation was a sense of freedom, a sense of adventure.

9

His friends did not feel this. They had called a local psychiatric hospital, and had told them the situation. Sidney freaked out at their lack of understanding, but had to agree to go, if he was going to get to the airport. When they got there, his friends talked to a psychiatrist. Then the psychiatrist talked to him. Sidney felt as though he was being very logical. He wanted to go to California and meet rank Zappa.

Anything wrong with that?

10

Sidney's impulsiveness had proven to be his downfall. The psychiatrist had told Sidney that he thought he was having a nervous breakdown, and that he should admit himself. If he did admit himself, he could sign himself out with a three day notice. If he didn't sign himself in, the psychiatrist would have him court-committed for sixty days.

11

Sidney had places to go, so he signed himself in. He still had good health insurance from his former employment which allowed him to stay at a very high priced, exclusive institution for at least thirty days. His friends left - he was in a hospital room, sitting on a bed, waiting for the doctor to come in to examine him. A young man was masturbating in the bed next to him. Sidney said to himself, "What the hell have I gotten into?" They started giving him a drug called Thorazine.

12

Eventually they let him go to the activities building. He went into the bathroom and climbed out the window.

He had escaped. People didn't understand. He understood what was going on. He ran through the woods, saying to himself, "I know I'm not crazy. I know I'm not crazy." He didn't know where he was, but he made it to a road. He still felt invincible.

13

He got a ride to the gas station his boss owned to convince him that he had made a mistake. The people he thought were his friends freaked out.

14

He ran down the road. He was going to go to Boston to see a psychiatrist that would prove that he wasn't crazy. He was having a sloe gin fizz in a bar when his boss came in and convinced him to go back to the hospital.

15

Sidney spent another three weeks in the hospital, and was released when his insurance ran out.

16

He had lost contact with his mother's side of his family, but because his aunt worked at the hospital, his family bonds were re-established.

17

Thank God, the doctor had prescribed over five hundred milligrams of Thorazine a day. His mother had been taking fifty milligrams a day. Five hundred milligrams wasn't even having an effect on him.

18

His mother called the psychiatrist and told him he wasn't going to take it any more. Saved from the life of a zombie—for now.

19

After a while the drug wore off, and Sidney felt human again. He started driving a cab in Lowell, where he now lived. His sense of excitement would never leave him. His need for getting out of unpredictable situations got him in trouble a couple more times.

20

He wanted to see what it would be like to get arrested, so he threw a bag of marijuana into a police cruiser. The officer refused to arrest him. He insisted, and was arrested. His one night in that cold, smelly cell was unbearable.

21

The next day in court, he lit his jacket on fire.

He hadn't eaten in over eighteen hours.

This was unbearable!

22

The court had him committed to a state institution.

23

No country club this time. When he arrived on the ward, it was a whole other world. People walking around speaking incoherently. He would be in the land of zombies for thirty days. The people in this institution were from some of the very lowest rungs of society—welfare cases, career loonies, schizophrenics, and an assortment of unique characters.

24

This time they gave Sidney Haldol. Even with a pill that warded off the side effects, Sidney still exhibited the symptoms of the side effects — his neck was stiff, bright lights hurt his eyes, and his leg was always shaking like he was keeping a beat. His thoughts were racing a mile a minute. He was entering the zombie zone — some people don't come back. Maybe it was because they had no place else to go. But Sidney had someplace else



to go, and after thirty days he was released.

25

He lived with some friends for a while and started  
to drive a cab again

26

After a while, life had gotten boring again. He ended  
up in that hospital one more time, because he had no  
place else to go—this time in, it was a different crowd.  
Not taking their medication, or rather, faking taking it.  
Smoking pot once in a while. The food was good.  
He developed friendships.

27

The year was 1977. He would meet a number of people  
who would spend their lives in and out of that hospital,  
but this would be Sidney's last visit to any psychiatric  
hospital.

28

After a couple of months, they let him out. He had  
been forced to take the medication, and now he stopped.

29

He was on welfare and living in a rooming house in  
Lowell. Someone had stolen his food stamps.

30

Sidney, and sometimes a friend, would sneak into the lunch line at the local mental hospital. The cook thought they were day patients.

31

Sometimes he would eat the donuts and drink the coffee at a drop-in center called the Renaissance Club. Couple-day-old donuts were free, and coffee was a nickel.

32

He stopped taking the Nut Juice (the medication) and started to feel normal again.

33

Sidney had few friends in this town. He was green to the ways of the world. Too innocent for city like Lowell. But he would learn. It's interesting the things you find to do when you don't have money. When he got his welfare check, he would have a couple of dollars left over, and walk to Adams Street and buy some joints for a dollar apiece from the Puerto Ricans. You have to have something in life to look forward to. Without it, life is meaningless.

34

It got to the point that he was so broke and so disgusted with life, that it had caused him to smash

his hollow-body bass guitar against the radiator in  
his room, and throw all his clothes, poetry, and  
music  
recordings in the dumpster.

35

He sold his imported and rare albums to a friend  
of one of the tenants for twenty dollars.

36

He went and bought some joints on Adams Street,  
twelve for ten.

They were only pin joints, but Sidney was  
in heaven.

37

He went to a bar on the outskirts of town that a  
neighbor with a hook-arm had told him  
was interesting.

38

He got there and was drinking everything on  
the table. Sidney got drunk.

39

He left the place and was walking home drunk –  
he had a long ways to go, and he knew it. He  
fell down on the side of the road.

40

A car stopped and asked him if he was all right and asked him if he wanted a ride. He said yes and got in. Surprisingly, he was absolutely sober when he got in.

41

They drove him home and smoked some pot with him.

42

Eventually Sidney would get his job back at the cab company and get off the welfare rolls.

43

He would start to write poetry again, and song lyrics. He felt he was again a member of the human race.

44

He would start to read about spiritual matters, astral projection, books by Carlos Castaneda, books about Tibetan and Zen Buddhism, and eventually Idries Shah.

45

This was the grounding that settled his impulsiveness, but still gave him

a purpose in life.

46

Soon he would tire of driving a cab, and get a job at the Wash & Fold laundromat. He developed a suitable life situation.

